

The Knoxian Paradox: Ecumenism and Nationalism in the Scottish Reformation

Delivered to the Society on the occasion of the Fourth Centenary of the death of John Knox.

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One might expect that the effect of John Knox's reforming activity in Scotland would be the intensification of Scottish nationalism and a corresponding withering of whatever sense of *oikoumene* had previously existed. Certain aspects of his work do indeed point in this direction, but Knox tempered the growing spirit of Scottish nationalism in religion. As a consequence of his work the Scottish Kirk in the later sixteenth century had a modest but real ecumenical outlook. Knox was no ecumenist in the sense that he promoted major conferences for unity and harmony, though he did urge the holding of conferences between the faithful of England and Scotland. Nor is he the equal of Martin Bucer in the task of reconciliation. Temperamentally his partisan spirit was unsuited for such a role. He may, however, be compared in his ecumenical spirit with Thomas Cranmer, who welcomed continental theologians and "kept constantly in mind the idea of a common Christian council and of some league of Protestant Churches."¹ Despite disagreement between the two men on matters of worship (which did not prevent them from belonging to the same communion), both looked to continental Protestants for fellowship and intellectual inspiration. Knox's ecumenical spirit did not keep him from experiencing sharp confrontations with differing beliefs, but it did enable him (as it does ecumenical leaders of the twentieth century) to "recognize the inadequacy of any one tradition," and to combine its insights with his own, bringing the respective churches closer together in their opportunity for Christian fellowship.²

Knox was instrumental in providing the reformed Kirk of Scotland with an unusually eclectic theology and polity that were conducive to the Kirk's active participation in the Christian *oikoumene*, the universal fellowship of Christians (which, for Knox, excluded the Catholics and the Anabaptists). Simultaneously,

¹ Stephen Neill, *The Christian Society* (New York, 1952), 156.

² *Ibid.*, 311.

however, the distinctiveness of the eclectic theology and polity, coupled with Knox's incipient development of the covenant concept, paved the way for a nationalistic Kirk. This is the Knoxian paradox. Yet Knox's governing principle was never conceived in either nationalist or ecumenical terms. That principle, narrowly conceived and reflecting an intolerance born out of strong convictions, was stringent adherence to divine precepts. Stated simply, it required that "in the religion of God onlie oght his owne Word to be considered . . ." "Vaine religion and idolatrie I call whatsoever is done in Goddes service or honour, without the expresse commaundement of his own Worde."³ The subject of this paper concerns the relationship of this principle, which was Knox's deepest motivation, to the national and ecumenical orientation of the Scottish Kirk in the Reformation.

The Scottish Kirk in the fifteenth century was not only influenced by the emergence of nationalist feelings, but also contributed to the growth of those sentiments. It did so in a variety of ways. First, in keeping with the spirit of nationalism, liturgical reform was undertaken to give new emphasis to the Scottish saints in the liturgy. Secondly, national pilgrimage centres were popularized by the Kirk. The effectiveness of the Kirk's efforts appears in the interest shown by James III, James IV, and James V in undertaking pilgrimages to the shrines of Scottish saints, sometimes annually. Thirdly, Scottish nationalism was one of the motives for the foundation of Scotland's three oldest universities in the fifteenth century. King's College, Aberdeen, was founded explicitly *ad patriae ornamentum*. Finally, there is evidence to indicate that the more elaborate churches being built were erected at least in part to rival those of other lands, a fact noted by foreign dignitaries.⁴

During the sixteenth century Scottish Catholics continued to think in terms of the national character of their Kirk. A striking illustration of this is in the work of the reforming councils held between 1549 and 1559. Much of the councils' work involved reaffirmation of universal Catholic practices and dogma, but there is a striking lack of reference to the papacy. The articles enacted by the 1549 council on which inquisitors were to found their inquiries refer to the authority of general councils but not the papacy. The 1552 council decreed that Archbishop John Hamilton's *Catechism* be read in the kirks despite its silence on papal authority. The *Compendius Tractive* (1558) by Quintin Kennedy, abbot of Crossraguel, who was present at the 1549 council, dealt substantially with the question of ecclesiastical authority, but omitted any discussion of the papacy. Once more, the 1559 council

³ *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh, 1895), IV, 446, 468.

⁴ David McRoberts, "The Scottish Church and Nationalism in the Fifteenth Century," *The Innes Review*, XIX (Spring 1968), 3-14.

discussed the right of the Kirk or of a general council to define matters of the faith, but ignored the papacy.⁵

This implicit criticism of papal authority in Scotland had its roots in conciliarism, nationalism, and the practical issue of the control of the Scottish Kirk and its wealth. In the fifteenth century criticism was manifest in anti-papal legislation and Scottish participation in the conciliar movement. In the sixteenth century, interest in conciliarism waned and Scottish Catholics began to go their own way on several doctrinal matters as they increased control of the Kirk. Hamilton's *Catechism*, for example, is closer to the teaching of Luther than of Trent on the matter of justification, and from the Catholic standpoint the treatment accorded to the Mass is unsatisfactory. The 1552 council also accepted the suggestion of the temporal lords that the sacraments be not administered until the people had been given an explanation of the rites in the vernacular — a practice that may reflect the Protestant insistence on the conjunction of the Word and sacraments. To be sure, the vast bulk of Catholic dogma was retained, but in the years before 1560, Scottish Catholics were obviously thinking more in terms of *Scottish* Catholicism than *Roman* Catholicism.⁶

Reform-minded leaders of Scottish Catholicism in the mid-sixteenth century failed to effect what they desired, making the task of Knox and his colleagues simpler. Had the Catholics been able to produce effective leadership and a dedicated, educated clergy, and had they not been so heavily encumbered by their meddling French allies, it is conceivable that they could have relied on nationalist sentiment to repudiate the programme advocated by the Protestants. Certainly they had already been fusing Scottish Catholicism and nationalism for more than a century. There were even Catholic leaders, including Knox's probable mentor, John Major, who had advocated an Anglo-Scottish alliance on nationalist grounds, as Major did in his *History* of 1521.

Knox, however, made little use of nationalist sentiment. On the contrary, he was actually accused of preferring England's

⁵ J. H. S. Burleigh, "The Scottish Reforming Councils, 1549 to 1559," *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, IX (1951-53), 189-211; W. Stanford Reid, "The Scottish Counter-Reformation before 1560," *Church History*, XIV (1945), 109ff., especially 118; Maurice Taylor, "The Conflicting Doctrines of the Scottish Reformation", in *Essays on the Scottish Reformation*, ed. David McRoberts (Glasgow, 1962), 252-55. *Statutes of the Scottish Church, 1225-1559*, ed. David Patrick (Edinburgh, 1907), includes the enactments of the councils. For Hamilton's *Catechism* see *The Catechism of John Hamilton, Archbishop of St Andrews, 1552*, ed. T. G. Law (Oxford, 1884).

⁶ Reid, *The Growth of Anti-Papalism in Fifteenth Century Scotland* (Philadelphia, 1944), 3ff.; J. H. Burns, "The Conciliarist Tradition in Scotland," *The Scottish Historical Review*, XLII (October 1963), 89-104; Taylor, *Essays*, 252-255.

cause to that of Scotland. In 1571, a year before his death, he answered such charges thus: "What I haue bene to my cuntrie, albeit this vnthankful aige will not knowe, yet the aiges to come wilbe compelled to beir witnes to the treuth."⁷ The phrase is nebulous, but what in fact he had been to his country was a man whose transcending principle was steadfast loyalty to the Word of God, not Scotland.

The charges of his accusers are not altogether ungrounded. Knox had a pronounced liking for England. His first wife was English. Three of the four women whom he loved most deeply — Mrs Bowes, her daughter, and Mrs Anne Locke — were English.⁸ His language was English; even after he permanently returned to Scotland he made no effort to revive his Scots dialect.⁹ Those whom he selected as the godfathers of his sons were the Englishmen William Whittingham and Miles Coverdale. The boys went to Cambridge University, not to one of the Scottish universities, and the younger became a vicar in the Church of England. In January 1554, Knox explicitly affirmed his concern for England over Scotland: "Somtyme I have thought that impossible it had bene, so to have removed my affection from the Realme of Scotland, that eny Realme or Nation coulde have bene equall deare unto me. But God I take to recorde in my conscience, that the troubles present (and appearing to be) in the Realme of England, are double more dolorous unto my hert, then ever were the troubles of Scotland."¹⁰ Knox's concern for England during his exile makes it evident that this was no idle statement. His attacks against Mary Tudor embodied more than accusations of idolatry. Their gravamen is that she endangered English independence and the general welfare of the English commonwealth, that she violated English laws and trampled upon English liberties. The tenor of Knox's writing is indeed such that a modern scholar can refer, not without reason, to "Knox's English nationalism," noting that his political writings during the Marian Exile "were more those of an ordinary [English] patriot than of a prophet. . . ."¹¹

Knox's continual desire for amity with England during the course of the Scottish Reformation was thus due to more than the political necessity to use England as a counter to France. His deep-rooted respect for England and its Church, established while

⁷ Richard Bannatyne, *Memorials of Transactions in Scotland*, MDLXIX-MDLXXIII (Edinburgh, 1836), 103.

⁸ This is discussed by Robert Louis Stevenson, "John Knox and His Relations to Women," *Familiar Studies of Men and Books* (New York, 1905).

⁹ Marjory A. Bald, "The Pioneers of Anglicised Speech in Scotland," *The Scottish Historical Review*, XXIV (April 1927), 184

¹⁰ *Works*, III, 113.

¹¹ Paul M. Little, "John Knox and English Social Prophecy," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society of England*, XIV (May 1970), 124.

he was in England during the Edwardian period, make it most unlikely that his friendship for England after 1558 was merely that of the politique. He loved England and respected English Protestantism, "seeing that in principalls we all agree."¹² Although he was undoubtedly disappointed that the Elizabethan Church had stagnated rather than pressed for further reforms of the kind he envisaged, he maintained an ecumenical outlook toward it. When queried in 1568 about the advisability of separating from the Church of England, he counselled against such action on the grounds that it would wrongly condemn the ministry of that Church.¹³ In this connection it should be noted that although there are grounds for regarding Knox as one of the fathers of English Puritanism, there is nothing in his thought that would support the later *jure divino* Presbyterianism of Thomas Cartwright and his colleagues. Knox would have reformed, not abolished, episcopacy. This was, of course, in keeping with the position of English Puritans before Cartwright.¹⁴ Where Knox most strongly influenced the Puritan tradition was on the matter of authority, viz. stringent adherence to express Biblical principles in religious matters.¹⁵

The concern of Knox and his Scottish colleagues for the Church of England is manifest in the action taken by the General Assembly on 27th December 1566. A letter was sent from the General Assembly to the bishops and pastors of the Church of England urging a more tolerant policy toward the use of surplices and other vestments. The letter bears evidence of Knox's authorship: civil authority is to be resisted if it burdens "the consciences of the faithful further than God chargeth them in his own word." Knox's favorite target — idolatry — is attacked once more: "If surplice, corner-cap and tippet have been the badges of idolaters in the very act of their idolatry, what hath the preachers of Christian liberty, and the rebukers of superstition to do with the dregs of that Romish Beast?"¹⁶ The letter manifests not only Knox's ecumenical concern, but also the subordination of that

¹² Peter Lorimer, *John Knox and the Church of England* (London, 1875), 263.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 298-300, for Knox's letter.

¹⁴ For a synopsis of their views, see *Elizabethan Puritanism*, ed. Leonard J. Trinterud (New York, 1971), 10ff.

¹⁵ Knox's adamancy on the matter of Scriptural precedent credits him with the negative accomplishment of being the fountain of those who, in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, "barricaded themselves behind the divine walls of a new scholastic legalism based largely on the use of the Bible as a precedent." This development was obviously contrary to an ecumenical outlook. George Yule, "Continental Patterns and the Reformation in England and Scotland," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, XXII (September 1969), 311.

¹⁶ *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland*, ed. William Croft Dickinson (New York, 1950), II, 199-200. The letter is also included in *Works*, VI, 438-40.

concern to his governing principle — fidelity to the divine commands. Tact was not allowed to temper prophetic proclamation. Certainly a closer unity would have existed if he had been willing to accept the *Book of Common Prayer*, but unity was subordinate to obedience to the Word.¹⁷ This incident underscores the fact that although men of ecumenical spirit continue to have sharp confrontations on matters of consequence, they do not allow such confrontations to disrupt the sense of fellowship and concern. Knox clearly did not succumb to the national or insular isolationism that threatened the Church of England.¹⁸

Knox's ecumenical outlook extended to various continental Protestant churches. His early desire to visit the German Lutherans never materialized, but he remained indebted to early Lutheran influence on his thought. The possibility for greater contact with the Lutherans was actually ruled out by the Lutherans themselves, not Knox, for they were markedly hostile to the Marian exiles for political reasons and differences about the nature of the Real Presence.¹⁹ Knox's connections with the Reformed Churches in Switzerland, France, and Germany are well known, as are his dealings with Reformed leaders such as Calvin, Heinrich Bullinger, Peter Viret of Lausanne and Theodore Beza. These contacts continued after the Reformation in Scotland was under way. There was, for example, the submission of the Second Helvetic Confession of Faith from "the Churches of Geneva, Berne, and Basle, with other Reformed Churches of Germany and France"²⁰ to the Scottish Protestants in 1566. The Confession was enclosed with a letter from Beza to Knox — not to one of the superintendents — underscoring Knox's ecumenical leadership in Scotland. Beza's letter attested to Knox's ecumenical spirit when he wrote that "there has always existed, and . . . there will exist to the last between us, that complete union of mind which is confirmed by the bond of one and the same spirit and faith."²¹ Additional evidence of the continuing ties exists in extant letters between Calvin and Knox (1559, 1561) and from Beza to Knox (1569, 1572). The correspondence is very candid, though Calvin urges Knox to be more moderate and Beza warns him of the dangers of episcopacy (an opinion Knox did not fully share).²² Geneva was clearly aware of differences with Scotland on various matters, but this did not hinder relations between the churches. During the same period (c. 1565-66) Knox's correspondence also manifests his continued interest in the affairs of the Huguenots.²³

¹⁷ See Reid, "Knox's Attitude to the English Reformation," *Westminster Theological Journal*, XXVI (1963), 24ff.

¹⁸ Neill, *The Christian Society*, 263.

¹⁹ A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (New York, 1964), 286.

²⁰ *John Knox's History*, II, 190.

²¹ *Works*, VI, 544, 613.

²² *Ibid.*, VI, 75-77, 94-98, 123-24, 133-35, 562-65, 613-15.

²³ Jasper Ridley, *John Knox* (New York, Oxford, 1968), 462.

An open letter from Knox and the superintendents John Spottiswood, John Winram, and John Erskine of Dun, dated 26th December 1565, provides an interesting illustration of an informal ecumenical outlook. The letter was written on behalf of Robert Hamilton, Christopher Goodman's successor at St. Andrews, and Robert Campbell of Kinzeanceleuch, a friend of Knox. The letter is addressed to the churches in England, France, Germany (including perhaps the Lutherans?), and elsewhere, requesting that they receive the two men warmly.²⁴ All details of their journey, if taken, are apparently unknown.

The possibility for ecumenical fellowship was enhanced by the eclectic theology of the reformed Kirk of Scotland, moulded substantially but not exclusively by Knox. To read the works of Knox or the Scots Confession of 1560 and find nothing more than unadulterated Calvinism betrays a preconceived judgment of their contents. It also necessitates overlooking a pertinent statement by Knox himself. Following the debate with William Maitland of Lethington at the General Assembly of June 1564, Knox was ordered to write to Calvin "and to the learned in other Kirks" to ascertain their judgment on the general question of the obedience of subjects to their sovereigns. Knox refused, saying, "I myself am not only fully resolved in conscience, but also I have heard the judgments in this, and *all other things* that I have affirmed within this Realm, of the most godly and most learned that be known in Europe. I came not to this Realm without their resolution; and for my assurance I have the handwritings of *many*. . . ."²⁵ There is no question that Knox admired Calvin, but he did not blindly and slavishly follow the Genevan reformer.

This is not the place for a thorough analysis of Knox's theology, which I have undertaken elsewhere,²⁶ but several points may be noted. First, the doctrine of predestination, so important to Calvin, receives little treatment in the writings of Knox and the Scots Confession (where the chapter on election is devoted to the work of Christ). A major place is given to predestination in the controversial tract published by Knox in 1559 against an anonymous opponent whom Knox loosely calls an Anabaptist; but the circumstances in which it was written are significant. Its composition came on the heels of the publication of Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet*, a treatise which severely displeased Calvin. Knox was close to being *persona non grata* in Geneva, and needed to atone to Calvin and the Genevan authorities for the publication of this work. He obviously remembered being forced to leave Frankfurt by its magistrates for the political views he had uttered in his *Admonition to England*. Moreover, Knox's

²⁴ *The Miscellany of the Wodrow Society*, ed. David Laing, I (Edinburgh, 1844), 283-84, 287-88.

²⁵ *John Knox's History*, II, 134. Italics mine.

²⁶ *John Knox: Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation*.

treatise was written in the aftermath of Calvin's controversies with Sebastian Castellio and Jerome Bôlsec. In the ensuing intellectual climate in Geneva it became something of a shibboleth to defend Calvin's doctrine. Beza made it the subject of his *Summa totius Christianismi* (1555). Knox's colleague William Whittingham translated it into English as *A Brieve Declaration of the Chiefe Points of the Christian Religion* and published it in Geneva (1556). Anthony Gilby contributed *A Brieve Treatise of Election and Reprobation* (1556). Thus in writing about predestination Knox was undertaking an exercise designed to preserve his Geneva base of operations and perhaps restore his damaged reputation in England. Surely if the doctrine had meant so much to him, it would have received a more significant place in his other writings. Where it does appear in other works, it is essentially a paraphrase of Biblical material.²⁷ In any case, the doctrine of predestination was not Calvin's peculiar preserve. As early as February 1553, probably more than a year before he began reading Calvin, Knox was thinking in terms of predestination.²⁸ He subsequently developed this concept in Geneva, but once he returned to Scotland his interest in the doctrine quickly waned.

Secondly, one of the early sources of Protestant influence on Knox was Lutheranism. Knox warmly commended Henry Balnaves' compendium of Christianity with its theme of justification by faith and its marked reliance on Luther's commentary on Galatians. His precis of Balnaves' work was undertaken "to give my Confession of the article of Justification therein contained."²⁹ Knox went on, however, to blend Luther's doctrine of justification with Calvin's view of the rôle of the law in the Christian life. Lutheran influence is also likely on Knox's doctrine of the atonement (through *Patrick's Places*) and his conception of the Christian family (through Balnaves), and possibly his educational views (through the proposals of Luther and Melanchthon).

Thirdly, Scottish scholars have commented on the special emphasis given by Knox to the Lord's Supper. James S. McEwen has contended of Knox that "it was precisely in his teaching on the sacraments that he departed significantly from Calvin", both in emphasis and practice.³⁰ A major difference between Calvin and Knox on the Lord's supper was Knox's willingness to administer the sacrament before the establishment of an organised

²⁷ Cf. his tract on baptism and his 1557 letter to his brethren in Scotland. *Works*, IV, 119-28, 261-75.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, III, 349.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 9. Cf. *John Knox's History*, I, 92; and Hugh Watt, "Henry Balnaves and the Scottish Reformation," *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, V (1935), 23-29.

³⁰ McEwen, *The Faith of John Knox* (Richmond, Va., 1961), 47. Cf. Eustace Percy, *John Knox* (Richmond, Va., [1965]), 56.

visible church, as he did in Scotland in 1555-56.³¹ Knox's doctrine and practice of the Lord's supper are drawn largely from Martin Bucer and Heinrich Bullinger, the major figures in the formulation of the article on the Lord's supper in the First Helvetic Confession (1536). That article was designed to reconcile the Lutherans and the Swiss, and thus had ecumenical intent.³² Knox learned of Bucer's and Bullinger's views through George Wishart, and affirmed in the 1560s that he was practising the Lord's supper exactly as he had in 1547 at St Andrews.³³ Knox's statement has long puzzled historians, who have concluded either that Knox was mistaken or that he was a Calvinist in 1547. He was neither. He accepted Bucer's general doctrine and practice in 1547, which later harmonised with Calvin's views because Calvin also was indebted to Bucer for his general concept of the Lord's supper.³⁴ Indeed, the influence of Bucer (and Bullinger) on the Scottish Reformation has never been adequately recognised.

Knox was stricter than Calvin in excluding everything from the sacrament that was not expressly sanctioned by Scripture. Calvin, in fact, wrote to Knox in April 1561, pleading that Knox use discretion and be more tolerant on the matter of ceremonies. "The mysteries of God [must] be not polluted by absurd or unmeaning mixtures. With this exception, you know well that certain things, though not positively approved, must be tolerated."³⁵ The incident reveals a difference between the two men on the fundamental question of authority as well as the Lord's supper. Knox's stricter concept of authority is more akin to that of Wishart, Balnaves, and the Zwinglian John Hooper, one of Knox's colleagues in Edwardian England, than to that of Calvin. If Knox's position on authority had been more lenient, of course, the possibilities for greater ecumenical fellowship would have been improved. Yet for him the key to such fellowship was strict adherence to Scripture. An intensive analysis of other aspects of Knox's thought reveals further evidence of its eclecticism.

The eclectic theology was paralleled by an eclectic system of kirk government, as demonstrated by Janet MacGregor and Gordon Donaldson. The office of superintendent, for example, combined elements from the Lutheran superintendents of

³¹ Cf. McEwen, *The Faith of John Knox*, 56. Percy disagrees; *John Knox*, 189-90.

³² Hastings Eells, *Martin Bucer* (New Haven, London, 1931), 194-95.

³³ *John Knox's History*, I, 93.

³⁴ See G. S. M. Walker, "The Lord's Supper in the Theology and Practice of Calvin," in *John Calvin*, ed. G. E. Duffield (Grand Rapids, 1966), 131-48; Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids, 1957); B. A. Gerrish, "John Calvin and the Reformed Doctrine of the Lord's Supper," *McCormick Quarterly*, XXII (January 1969), 85-98.

³⁵ *Works*, VI, 124.

Germany and Denmark, the Edwardian bishops, the Swiss Reformed visitors, John à Lasco's superintendents, and the views expressed by Bucer in *De Regno Christi*. The eldership was akin to that in the Genevan Church, but Knox may also have learned of the eldership through the work of Wishart. The office of reader was probably borrowed from Zurich and Basle.³⁶ In other respects the polity of the Scottish Reformed Kirk reveals the influence of Valérand Pullain and the Hessian polity of 1526 developed by Francois Lambert.³⁷ To say, as Knox's standard biographer does that "Knox took his ideas of Church organisation . . . from Calvin . . ."³⁸ is inaccurate.

More significant is the fact that Knox's position on the ministry was mediatory. On the vital question of episcopacy he was not opposed to bishops; in fact he urged an increase in their number in England in 1559.³⁹ Yet he did not accept the often concomitant doctrine of apostolic succession, nor did he repudiate the underlying equality of all ministers, including bishops, whose only superiority was the exercise of delegated supervisory powers (as were given to the superintendents of the reformed Kirk of Scotland). As late as the year of his death (1572) Knox criticised the abuses associated with episcopacy in Scotland, but not episcopacy *per se*. What he sought was a reformed episcopacy — a position advocated or approved by a host of other writers, including Calvin, John à Lasco, Rudolph Gualter, Bucer, and the formulators of the Second Helvetic Confession. The ecumenical possibilities of Knox's mediatory position have been overlooked by later writers seeking to tie him to the more conservative Anglican position or the Presbyterian polity that developed after his death.⁴⁰

The eclectic polity and theology enhanced the likelihood for *oikoumene*. One aspect of Knox's thought that *initially* mitigated against a strongly nationalist Kirk was his concept of the covenant. An authority on the Scottish Reformation recently stated that Knox did not make use of the term "covenant" or of the covenant conception in his thought. This is erroneous. The

³⁶ The better studies of Scottish polity include Janet G. MacGregor, *The Scottish Presbyterian Polity: A Study of Its Origins in the Sixteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1926); Gordon Donaldson, "'The Example of Denmark' in the Scottish Reformation," *The Scottish Historical Review*, XXVII (April 1948), 57-64, and "The Polity of the Scottish Church, 1560-1600," *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, XI (1955), 212-26.

³⁷ MacGregor, *The Scottish Presbyterian Polity*, 39-42; Donaldson, *The Scottish Historical Review*, XXVII, 57-64; Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation* (Cambridge, 1960), 147-48.

³⁸ Ridley, *John Knox*, 255.

³⁹ *Works*, V, 518.

⁴⁰ Cf. G.S.M. Walker, "Scottish Ministerial Orders," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, VIII (1955), 238-54; Reid, *Westminster Theological Journal*, XXVI, 5ff.; Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation*; C. L. Warr, *The Presbyterian Tradition* (London, 1933).

best illustration of Knox's use of the covenant idea occurs in his 1554 tract, *An Admonition or Warning that the Faithful Christians in London, Newcastle, Berwick, and Others, May Avoid God's Vengeance*. Here Knox makes it abundantly clear that there is a covenant, and that the fundamental covenant obligation is to serve God and avoid idolatry. "In making whilk league, solemnedlie we sweir never to haif fellowship with ony religioun, exept with that whilk God hath confirmit be his manifest word."⁴¹

Knox's concept of the covenant in this work was not patterned after Calvin's thought. Calvin depicted the covenant as God's promise to man, which had been fulfilled in the Incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. Calvin did not ignore man's obligations, but he treated them as of less importance than the promissory aspect.⁴² Apart from his 1556 tract on baptism, Knox, on the other hand, dealt with the covenant essentially as a conditional promise calling for man's reciprocal obedience. This emphasis on the covenant as contract was made by Zwingli and Bullinger (among others) on the Continent, and by William Tyndale, John Hooper and others in England. It is also found in Oecolampadius's writings, which were circulating in Scotland as early as 1540.⁴³ There was also a native Scottish tradition upon which Knox may have drawn: the custom of private "banding" or "bonding", usually undertaken for the defence of lives and property. This band evolved into a "semi-legal baronial pressure group", of which there are the well-known examples of 1556-72.⁴⁴ Knox used the idea of band or covenant in this sense in his *History*, but he also developed concepts of the covenant more akin to those found in the Zwingli-Bullinger and Tyndale traditions. Knox's earliest concept of the covenant was that of an individual engaging in a reciprocal

⁴¹ *Works*, III, 191; cf. 190-93, 195.

⁴² For Calvin's concept of the covenant see Everett H. Emerson, "Calvin and Covenant Theology," *Church History*, XXV (June 1956), 136-44; Leonard J. Trinterud, "The Origins of Puritanism," *Church History*, XX (March 1951), 45; Jens G. Moller, "The Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, XIV (April 1963), 49-50; Greaves, "The Origins and Early Development of English Covenant Thought," *The Historian*, XXXI (November 1968), 25-26; Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, trans. Harold Knight (Philadelphia, 1956), Chap. VI.

⁴³ See Trinterud, *Church History*, XX, 39-41, 43; Moller, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, XIV, 47-48, 50-56; Greaves, *The Historian*, XXXI, 23-28; William A. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants, 1520-1535* (New Haven, 1964), 114, 158, 161, 172-74, 181-84, 188, 197, 203, 317; W. Morris S. West, "John Hooper and the Origins of Puritanism," *The Baptist Quarterly* (October 1954), 356-59.

⁴⁴ S. A. Burrell, "The Covenant Idea as a Revolutionary Symbol: Scotland, 1596-1637," *Church History*, XXVII (December 1958), 339-41; Rosalind Mitchison, *A History of Scotland* (London, 1970), 116.

contract with God. Yet the individual is not isolated; he is one of a number of believers acting in concert, though not as a nation. An example will illustrate the point: "It is necessarie," Knox wrote in 1554, "that we avoyd ydolatrie, because . . . otherwise we declair oure selves little to regard the league and covenant of God; for that league requyreis that we declair oure selves enemyis to all sortis of ydolatrie."⁴⁵

It is significant that the idea of being in covenant, bond, or league with God is initially developed in a work written to English Protestants. The covenant notion would lend itself well to a nationalist cause, but Knox did not initially use it in that sense. He recognized that the covenant had had nationalist meaning in the past, and he used this notion in one of his subsequent works. His conception of the covenant in *An Admonition* has distinct ecumenical implications: "All that be in this league ar one bodie, as Moses doth witness [Deut. 29], recompting men, wemen, childrene, servandis, princes, preastis, reularis, officeris, and strangeris within the Covenant of the Lord: Then plaine it is, that of one bodie thair must be one law; sa that whatever God requyreth of one, in that behalf, he requyreis the same of all."⁴⁶ This is the foundation of Knox's concept of *oikoumene*, or universal Christian fellowship.

The one law to which Knox referred had to do with service to God and the extirpation of idolatry. In later writings he developed this obligation against the background of a covenant or bond between God and his people. Two other types of covenant also appear in his works. In his *Faithful Admonition to the Professors of God's Truth in England* (1554), he implies the existence of a covenant between monarch and people based on national law and custom — a concept which developed in the late medieval period. Mary Tudor is castigated by Knox as a traitor to the English crown and people because, contrary to Parliamentary law, she had "made a proude Spaniarde kynge. . . ." She had violated her oath to the English people. Along the same lines, the Scots were later encouraged to emulate the "solemned othe or convenante" made between Asa and his people to serve God and punish idolaters (II Chron. 15). Mary Stewart was subsequently reminded of her "mutual contract" with the Scottish people.⁴⁷

Beginning in 1558 Knox discussed a covenant between the temporal powers and God. In his *Appellation* to the nobility and estates of Scotland, he argued that the reformation of religion and the punishment of idolatry was the duty of the civil magistrate. As proof he cited the covenant made by Josiah with God on behalf of the people (II Kings 23).⁴⁸ But he never relinquished

⁴⁵ *Works*, III, 193.

⁴⁶ *Works*, III, 191. Italics mine.

⁴⁷ *Works*, III, 295, 308-309; IV, 500; *John Knox's History*, II, 72.

⁴⁸ *Works*, IV, 489.

the idea of a direct covenant between God and his people. In his 1564 debate with Maitland of Lethington he contended that the people of a commonwealth were given sufficient force by God to resist and suppress open idolatry because they were bound by God to keep their land unpolluted.⁴⁹

In his development of these covenant concepts Knox avoids the possible implications for Scottish nationalism. His concern is to stress the duty of believers to obey the Higher Law, not the unity of the Scottish people in a national covenant with God. His conception of a united people is fundamentally one of united believers opposed to pagans and idolaters; the element of nationalism, when it is present, is thoroughly subordinate. A key Biblical example used by Knox is Exodus 34, where the Hebrews are reminded of the covenant with God not to worship false gods and idols. Referring to this covenant Knox wrote to the Scottish nobility and estates that "the Gentiles (I mean everie citie, realme, province, or nation amongst the Gentiles, embracing Christ Jesus and his true religion) be bound to the same leage and covenant that God made with his people Israel. . . ."⁵⁰ Knox never came closer than this to stating that the Scots are a covenanted nation.

He obviously conceived of the possibility of a covenanted nation, but he makes virtually nothing of the idea, and certainly does not use it to benefit significantly from the spirit of Scottish nationalism. He clearly does not think of Scotland as the elect nation of God, as did the Scottish Covenanters.⁵¹ Moreover, he is not so loyal to a Scottish monarch that he will countenance obedience if the sovereign is idolatrous. Luther's theory of obedience is much more conducive to the growth of nationalism than Knox's. The overt nationalism which characterizes Luther's appeal to the German princes finds no counterpart in Knox's *Appellation* to the Scottish nobility, where the emphasis is on active resistance to idolaters as a divine command. Even the common people, because of their covenant with God, must actively resist an idolatrous ruler,⁵² even a Scottish one. Yet Knox's doctrine of active resistance, while not conducive to

⁴⁹ *John Knox's History*, II, 121-22.

⁵⁰ *Works*, IV, 505; cf. IV, 506.

⁵¹ It would have been simple enough for Knox to have done so, since he was very likely acquainted with John Foxe's concept of England as the elect nation. See William Haller, *Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" and the Elect Nation* (London, 1963).

⁵² See *Works*, III, 221-26, 166, 184-86, 190-91, 194, 231-36, 239-49, 293ff., 309, 312, 325-26; IV, 284-85, 415-17, 441-42, 489, 527-28, 533-35, 539-40, for a sampling of John Knox's views on disobedience to 1558. Cf. J. H. Burns, "The Political Ideas of the Scottish Reformation," *Aberdeen University Review*, XXXVI (1955-56), 251-68; John Knox and Revolution," *History Today*, VIII (August 1958), 565-73; John R. Gray, "The Political Theory of John Knox," *Church History*, VIII (June 1939), 132-47, for good discussions of Knox's political views.

nationalism, hardly furthered ecumenical relations, especially with the Church of England and the Lutheran Churches.⁵³

The key to Knox's actions and beliefs is thus his adherence to the divine will above all else. This principle transcended any concerns whether ecumenical or nationalist in nature. His devotion to truth as he saw it prompted him to help to develop in Scotland a Kirk with an eclectic foundation and a modestly ecumenical outlook. It so happened that that Kirk was well-suited to the growing spirit of Scottish nationalism. No longer was there even a nominal relationship to a foreign head. The eclectic theology and polity of the Kirk made it a distinctively Scottish Kirk, even while enhancing the opportunity for ecumenical fellowship. Knox's statements about the covenant obligations of a commonwealth to God helped lay the foundation for the later development of the notion of Scotland as a covenanted nation. Paradoxically the eclectic foundation of theology and polity which Knox contributed to the Kirk of Scotland made it *sui generis*, and thus a suitable vehicle for the expression of Scottish national consciousness.

NOTES

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⁵³ Cf., e.g., the remarks of Archbishop Matthew Parker, in the *Correspondence of Matthew Parker, D.D., Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. John Bruce and Thomas Thomason Perowne (Cambridge, 1853), 61.